



30 October 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Implications of the Fall of Khrushchev for  
Soviet Military Policy

CONCLUSIONS

A. Khrushchev consistently worked for changes in Soviet military doctrine and force structure which favored strategic capabilities. At the same time, he exercised a restraining influence on the growth of total military expenditures. He effected reductions in general purpose forces, and apparently contemplated further cuts. If his replacement brings any change in the allocation of resources to defense, it will be upward.

B. The traditional arms of service, particularly the ground forces, are the ones most likely to benefit in the near term. If the new regime keeps general purpose forces at present levels, while continuing the building of strategic forces and the present high level of military R&D, the result will be a constant upward pressure on the Soviet military budget and on military manpower. In this case, it would not be long before the new leaders would have to consider a return to policies of restraining the growth of military spending.

C. Despite the removal of the guidepost provided by Khrushchev's known views, we think our estimates of Soviet military forces for the coming five years allow for the likely range of options and alternatives open to the USSR. The new leaders will almost certainly not find the problems of an unfavorable strategic balance and a strained economy any more tractable than Khrushchev did.

D. In the unlikely event that they decide upon a sharp increase in Soviet efforts to alter the strategic balance, it would be at least a year or two before such a decision could begin to affect military capabilities. We would have a good chance of obtaining indicators of such a development in the interim.

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1. The dismissal of Khrushchev cannot but raise serious questions as to the future course of Soviet military policy. Because of his Churchillian concern with the entire range of military affairs, Khrushchev was personally identified with virtually every innovation in the Soviet military establishment. Asserting the primacy of missiles and nuclear weapons, he stimulated their development and deployment. He brought about changes in military organization, including establishment of the Strategic Rocket Forces, which he thought to be required by the nuclear and missile age. He enunciated a strategic doctrine which, for the Soviets, was revolutionary, and he sparked a debate among senior military officers intended to bring their thinking up to date. He pressed hard for reductions in military force components which he considered to be obsolete or inappropriate to current strategic needs.

2. Although Khrushchev accomplished much, he did not do so unopposed. Our estimates have noted the opposition of most of the senior military leaders to Khrushchev's views on strategy and doctrine and their resistance to his recurring efforts at force reductions. The serious political crisis of late 1962-early 1963, in the aftermath of Cuba, almost certainly revolved around his conduct of military and economic policy. But with Khrushchev's apparently successful reassertion of authority in early 1963, it seemed reasonable to believe that if change occurred in Soviet military policy, it would be generally in the direction advocated by Khrushchev, and our estimates reflected this belief.

3. In NIE 11-4-64, we noted the likelihood that Khrushchev would "have passed from the scene by the end of the decade," and stated:

"What the attitude and policies of a new set of leaders will be cannot be estimated with any certainty. If, as we believe likely, economic and military questions are still paramount issues when Khrushchev departs, the professional advice of the military is likely to grow in importance. The chances for important changes in military policy may improve if a protracted succession struggle develops, but we believe it unlikely that radical departures would occur unless at the same time there were significant changes in the economic or strategic situations confronting the USSR."

These judgments were based upon the implicit assumption that death or voluntary retirement, rather than forced dismissal, would be the cause of Khrushchev's departure. Thus, their

continued validity depends to some extent upon the reasons for the ouster of Khrushchev and the circumstances surrounding it.

Involvement of Military Policy Questions and Military Leaders

4. There was probably no single reason for Khrushchev's ouster; a number of interests and causes and a variety of complaints about his style of leadership were no doubt responsible for the coalescing of anti-Khrushchev sentiments on the Presidium and among lower levels of the leadership. Among the many policy issues, the anti-Khrushchev case almost certainly included his overall handling of economic policies and, in particular, his plans affecting the allocation of resources among the various civilian and military claimants. Certainly no other domestic issue has so agitated the Soviet leadership over the past several years, and it was precisely this question of economic priorities that Khrushchev had raised again in forceful terms just prior to his removal.

5. Although the resources allocated to defense increased in each year of Khrushchev's rule, he evinced more and more determination to confine these increases to advanced weapons programs and to offset the costs of these programs by cutting conventional forces and manpower. We are quite sure that in the post-Cuba crisis within the USSR, some military and political

leaders applied powerful pressures for a major increase in allocations to defense. Khrushchev staved off the challenge to his authority at that time, evidently with the aid of Kozlov's illness, and immediately renewed his initiatives. Toward the end of 1963, he put through his ambitious new chemical program, launched a small reduction in the overt defense budget, and stated publicly that a further cut in military manpower was under consideration. During the spring of 1964 a small cut in military manpower may have been made, and in the summer some aircraft plants were ordered to make chicken incubators.

6. Military opposition found expression during 1964 in the continuing debate about strategic doctrine and force structure. In July, a compendium of articles by senior military officers was published that contained strong restatements of the "traditionalist" position that a general nuclear war might be protracted and that vast armies were required. In August, however, Marshal Sokolovskiy published an article which accepted the "modernist" thesis that general nuclear war would be short, but went on to argue that the USSR must be prepared to fight protracted non-nuclear wars. Thus a new and different argument would appear to have been brought forward to support the maintenance of military manpower and general purpose forces at high levels.

7. Finally, Khrushchev's major policy speech of late September gave notice of his position in the next round of economic planning. Future plans, he said, should be based on the premise that defense "is at its proper level" and that the "main task . . . is the further raising of the people's standard of living." Considering the rising costs of advanced weapons, this signified renewed pressure to cut conventional forces. Despite differences of opinion among the military leaders, most of them must have looked askance at these prospects. Thus they had their own reasons for joining the anti-Khrushchev consensus.

8. Our evidence indicates, however, that there was no direct use of military force in this particular coup. Unlike the time of Beria's removal and arrest in 1953, no unusual military concentrations have been brought into Moscow in the past few weeks. There have been no tanks in the streets. Such guarding of Khrushchev as may have been necessary has evidently been handled by the security police. We think that these differences from earlier times are more a measure of the way things are done in the Kremlin today than an indication of the degree of military participation in Khrushchev's removal. It is also clear that no Zhukov stepped forward, as in 1957, to stay the hand of the majority against Khrushchev. Instead it

appears that the conspirators took soundings among the military leaders in advance and obtained their assurances of support or at least neutrality.

Prospects for Near-Term Changes in Military Policy

9. Given the strained relations between Khrushchev and the marshals, we see no reason to suppose that the conspirators had to pay much of a price for the support or neutrality of the military. There may be some significance, however, in the consistency with which the new leaders and the Soviet press have asserted that the regime is "taking all measures necessary to strengthen" Soviet defenses. This stands in contrast to Khrushchev's statement in late September that defense had reached its "proper level," and goes beyond the reassurances of national strength which a fledgling regime might direct to the general populace. The initial statements by the post-Khrushchev leaders seem to promise something for everybody, strengthened defenses and more consumer goods, better relations with China and with East Europe, etc. But the tone of their welfare statements seems designed to warn consumers against any immediate optimism. Moreover, the slogans for 7 November drop long-standing references stressing mechanization of agriculture and the completion of chemical plants. Thus, while we think it

too early to say what changes in policy the new leaders will make, such indications as we have suggest that if there is any change in the allocation of resources to defense, it will be upward.

10. We think it unlikely, however, that the new regime will initiate any radical departure in military policy in the immediate future. In a very real sense, Khrushchev's departure means the removal of a force for change rather than the introduction of a new force. At the same time, his ouster removes from the scene a restraining influence which is not likely to be immediately replaced. We believe that this influence was used not only to hold down military spending, but also to cut back or cancel military projects which he regarded as marginal. The new leaders will probably not be able to deal as firmly with military recommendations as we think Khrushchev often did. Even collectively, they lack his power and prestige. Singly, they are involved in the struggle for succession, and may be tempted to make concessions to the military in order to enlist their support.

11. For a time at least, the new leaders will probably rely more heavily on professional military advice than Khrushchev did. We think that in recent years Khrushchev's initiatives kept the military on the defensive. Now they will

certainly seize the opportunity presented by his fall, and old issues may be reopened. We believe that their professional advice will tend to be conservative. The Soviet high command is made up entirely of ground force officers who won fame in World War II and who, we believe, lean to the traditionalist views expressed in the course of the continuing debate over strategy and doctrine. The untimely death of Marshal Biryuzov removed from the topmost military ranks the only man we felt sure was a modernist.\*

12. Unless some clearly modernist trend emerges soon, we think that the traditional arms of service, therefore, particularly the ground forces, are most likely to benefit from the change in regime. We do not reach this conclusion solely because we think Soviet marshals are sentimental about the good old days of World War II. Large new deployment programs for strategic weapons

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Biryuzov was probably the closest to Khrushchev of the favored "southern" group of military leaders. He was PVO chief for five years, then Strategic Rocket Forces chief for about a year, and was Chief of the General Staff at the time of his death. We thought he would probably have become Defense Minister under Khrushchev. He was the most experienced of the Soviet marshals in the field of modern strategic weapons. His death, like that of Marshal Nedelin in 1960, is a severe loss to the USSR in terms of professional military expertise.

are proceeding, and R&D on advanced systems is at record high levels. However, the marshals have apparently been concerned that Khrushchev, in his zeal to economize, would cut Soviet general purpose forces below the levels they considered necessary -- for a general nuclear war which some of them believe might be protracted, for a large-scale non-nuclear war which some of them believe might arise from US "flexible response" policies, and for a variety of other purposes including, we think, guarding against trouble with China. In this connection, one report of the charges against Khrushchev includes the accusation that, in his passion for strategic weapons, he unduly weakened conventional forces.

13. Assuming the continued building of forces for strategic attack and defense along the lines indicated by our evidence, the maintenance of general purpose forces at their present levels would in fact require some increase in military spending in each succeeding year. It would also contribute to an upward trend in military manpower requirements. It was this constant increase in the military claim that Khrushchev was resisting. If the reins are now loosed, the prospect would be for a steady rise in military expenditures like that which characterized Soviet military policy in the late 1950's and

early 1960's. It is possible that with new leadership, more efficient methods, and greater incentives to production, the Soviet economy could be made to sustain such a rise and at the same time meet other demands on it. It seems more likely to us, however, that before very long the new Soviet leadership, like Khrushchev, would again be seeking to restrain the growth in military spending.

Considerations Affecting the Longer Term

14. In general, we think our estimates of Soviet military forces for the coming five years allow for the likely range of options and alternatives open to the USSR. The factors influencing these estimates have included, in addition to direct evidence on the major military programs themselves, evaluations of the strategic, technical, and economic factors which we thought would affect future programs. But we cannot exclude the possibility that some change in these programs will eventuate, either because Khrushchev's political colleagues were not satisfied or because the military leaders were not. We must grant that Khrushchev's known strategic views were a guide post to us, that the new political leaders are as yet unknown quantities, and that a prolonged succession struggle could bring changes which are not now foreseeable.

15. In this situation, it is worth recalling the facts of life facing the USSR at present. Under Khrushchev, the USSR made basic strategic advances. With the advent of the ICBM, it acquired an impressive capability for direct nuclear attack on the US. More recently, it set in motion programs which for the first time are giving it well-protected retaliatory forces of substantial size. But despite these very real gains, during Khrushchev's tenure the USSR failed to find a way to overcome US strategic superiority, and it lost much of the secrecy which it once was able to use as a major military asset. The unfavorable strategic balance and the critical economic situation which confronted Khrushchev still confront the new leadership. We doubt that they will find these problems any more tractable than Khrushchev did.

16. In the unlikely event that the new leaders decide upon a sharp increase in Soviet efforts to alter the strategic balance, lead-times in major programs are such that it would be at least a year or two before such decisions could begin to affect Soviet strategic capabilities. Signals to watch for would include early indications of some sweeping alteration in economic priorities, some major intensification or alarming trend in military R&D, or some drastic change in the Soviet evaluation of the strategic possibilities.

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